YOUTH 4 PEACE ALBANIA

Next-Gen Policy:

AI and Digitalization in the YPS Agenda for Youth in Albania

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December 2024

Contents

1. Introduction

While digitalisation and technological developments like artificial intelligence are ever-evolving, exploring pathways how peacebuilding can serve as a catalyst for youth empowerment emerges as a new field of interest for actors in the peacebuilding field. This realization led to this paper guided by Albania's aspirations of young people for involvement and empowerment in peacebuilding efforts through using digital tools and AI technologies.

Young people in Albania, in addition to being an important stakeholder in the its growth, the youth demographic comprising around 40% of population as per the INSTAT data in 2023[1] , are also a key force behind innovation and digital adoption. This presents one big opportunity: enabling young people to be change agents using technology to further peace and security goals is also a key force behind innovation and digital adoption. However, it is worth noting that in Albania there is also a crucial gap in incorporating youth-led digital innovations into national policy frameworks, and while this potential is still mainly unrealised it presents hope and opportunity for the future

Globally, artificial intelligence and digitalization are bringing transformative tools from conflict monitoring and early warning systems to fostering civic engagement through digital platforms[2]. In Albania, digitalization holds the potential to address critical challenges such as misinformation, hate speech and online polarization, key issues that affect peace and security dynamics.

This paper, based on desk research and policy analysis outlines a forward-looking roadmap for integrating digital tools into Albania's Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) framework. It aims to spark debate on global digital trends, encourage further scientific and academic research and highlight the role of youth in strengthening peace and security as part of Albania's digital transformation journey.

The YPS Agenda in Changing Landscapes

The YPS agenda emerged as a global framework to recognize and amplify the role of youth in fostering peace and preventing violence. Rooted in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) the agenda calls for inclusive youth participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security[aa]. However, the socio-political and technological landscapes in which the YPS agenda operates are undergoing rapid transformation, driven by digitalization and the increasing influence of AI. These developments come with both opportunities and challenges, particularly for countries like Albania which are navigating their own digital transformation while striving to strengthen democracy, and youth participation and engagement in Albania.

Nowadays, digital tools and platforms are reshaping the ways youth engage with peace and security initiatives[4]. Social media and digitally powered tools enable faster mobilization, greater access to information and innovative

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[1]Population of Albania as of 1 January 2023; https://www.instat.gov.al/media/11654/population-of-albania-on-1-january-2023.pdf
[2]Hannah Heinzekehr (2020), A new AI early warning system to combat disinformation and prevent violence previewed in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists; https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/news/a-new-ai-early-warning-system-to-combat-disinformation-and-prevent-violence-previewed-in-the-bulletin-of-atomic-scientists/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[3]Youth, Peace and Security, A guide by UN: https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/youth-peace-and-security-guide
[4]UN, Digital Technologies; https://peacemaker.un.org/en/thematic-areas/digital-technologies

approaches to conflict resolution such as predictive analytics for early warning systems. For Albania, where youth are key drivers of civic engagement and also the one generation that mostly used digital tools in their daily life for their personal and professional purposes, integrating these technological shifts into the YPS agenda is essential to maintaining its relevance and effectiveness.5

Furthermore, Albania's commitment to its digital transformation agenda, powered also by its aspirations for European Union membership, places Albania at a critical juncture. By incorporating youth perspectives and technological advancements in the YPS agenda, Albania has the potential to not only address its challenges in this field but also position itself as a good example that adopts innovative, youth-driven approaches to peace and security.

Methodology

This paper aims to explore the transformative potential of digitalization and artificial intelligence in advancing the YPS agenda in Albania. It explores Albania's readiness to leverage digital tools for peacebuilding and youth engagement to provide an overall assessment of the opportunities and limitations within Albania's digital landscape. It also offers recommendations to align Albania's youth policies with digital trends, addressing challenges while leveraging AI and digital tools to empower youth in peace and security initiatives.

The approach kept throughout the work behind the paper integrates a multi-phase qualitative analysis approach to analyze the potential of digitalization and AI in advancing the Youth, Peace, Security Agenda in Albania, with the main components being desk research on global and local literature in digitalization, AI and YPS, policy review focused on analysing Albania's national strategic documents, including the National Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-20266 and data focusing on patterns and disparities related to digital accessibility, literacy and infrastructure in Albania. The final recommendations aim to provide a framework of how digital tools can enhance the YPS framework in Albania and empower youth to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

Contextualizing the YPS Agenda Globally and in Albania

The five main pillars of the YPS agenda, participation, protection, prevention, collaboration and disengagement/reintegration, are outlined in the UNSCR 2250[7]. Although there has been global progress in including youth perspectives into peacebuilding initiatives, Albania still faces challenges in this regard. Albania's support to YPS programs and initiatives in Albania, particularly though the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)[8] might spark significant change in both internal and regional contexts, given its youthful population and history of social and political upheavals.

Even with advancements in digital infrastructure, a lot of policies continue to ignore the structural obstacles that prevent meaningful engagement in governance and peacebuilding processes or fail to take into account the

[5]UN, Albania – Digital Development Country Profile (2022);
https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Digital%20Development%20Country%20Profile_Albania_final_02.22.pdf
[6]National Digital Agenda and Action Plan 2022-2026 for Albania https://qbz.gov.al/eli/vendim/2022/06/01/370/8fd7b0cf-6848-431f-8bcb-5d08d16deaa7
[7]YPS Agenda, UN:
https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth#:~:text=The%20Youth%2C%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Agenda&text=
This%20landmark%20resolution%20identifies%20five,partnerships%2C%20and%20disengagement%20and%20reintegration.
[8]The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants
(WB 6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation
between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs.: www.rycowb.org

needs of young people. There is still much need for improvement due to the lack of inter-ministerial collaboration on youth issues and the inadequate incorporation of the YPS pillars into Albania's digital transformation strategies. In order to ensure that Albania's youth are not only beneficiaries but also active designers of digital transformation, it would be necessary to make a concerted effort to include youth voices in strategic planning, policy implementation, and monitoring processes in order to align the digitalization agenda with the YPS framework.

Many young people lack the skills necessary to use digital tools or take part in AI-driven projects, especially those living in rural areas. The YPS framework's emphasis on inclusivity is undermined by this digital divide, which not only restricts their capacity to support peacebuilding initiatives but also makes already-existing disparities worse. Targeted investments in digital education and skills training are crucial to closing this gap, with an emphasis on reaching disadvantaged and marginalised youth.

Rural and economically disadvantaged populations are frequently left behind in the process of digital transformation, and accessibility issues also extend to infrastructure and internet connectivity. This discrepancy exacerbates the divide between urban and rural communities by providing unequal chances for young involvement in governance and peacebuilding. A multi-stakeholder strategy is needed to address these issues, including the government, universities/academia, businesses, civil society and the media.

Finally, by enabling focused interventions and offering data-driven insights into conflict processes, AI-powered solutions can improve the efficacy of Albania's peacebuilding initiatives. For example, governments and youth organisations may be able to more effectively deploy resources and identify at-risk communities with the use of predictive analytics. In a similar vein, AI might help platforms for civic engagement that let young people take part in decision-making and keep an eye on how peacebuilding initiatives are being carried out. These resources can help young people develop a sense of agency, which is consistent with the YPS agenda's focus on involvement and teamwork.

Albania must give priority to capacity-building programs that provide young people the know-how to uaase digital tools efficiently if it hopes to take full advantage of these prospects. This entails creating innovation assisting youth-led technology projects, and integrating AI literacy and digital peacebuilding into academic courses. Furthermore, developing alliances with global institutions and tech firms can supply the funds and know-how required to put innovative digital solutions into practice. By doing this, Albania may establish itself as a pioneer in the region for incorporating technology into the YPS agenda, opening the door to a more resilient and inclusive strategy for peace and security.

Role of AI and Digitalization in Reshaping Youth Engagement and Peacebuilding

Artificial intelligence and digitalisation are fundamentally altering how societies view peacebuilding and youth involvement. Examples of AI-powered techniques that enable the identification of patterns in complaints,

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[8]The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the Western Balkans 6 participants (WB 6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programs.: www.rycowb.org

misinformation, and social unrest include data analytics and machine learning algorithms.[9] In order to enable governments and civil society organisations to take focused action against these risks, AI can also make it easier to identify bad individuals and misinformation networks.

Additionally, by tailoring instaructional materials for various child demographics, AI-driven algorithms can improve media literacy programs by giving young people the critical thinking abilities necessary to separate fact from fiction. Albania can enable its young people to become knowledgeable digital citizens who can lessen the negative impact of false information on their communities by incorporating AI into civic education initiatives. These actions not only support the prevention and protection aspects of the YPS agenda, but they also demonstrate how technology can promote a resilient and peaceful society.

Another example is that of social media and other digital communication platforms that play a significant role in raising the voices of youth. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok can be used to share accomplishments, encourage group action, and foster conversation. These platforms can serve as a bridge between young people and decision-makers in Albania, where youth comprise a significant portion of the population, ensuring that their perspectives are taken into consideration. In order to foster a sense of unity and shared purpose in peacebuilding efforts, digital tools for online communications can also facilitate the development of friendly online communities where young people can collaborate across cultural and geographic barriers.

Because digitalisation lowers obstacles to access and offers creative venues for collaboration, it presents an unmatched opportunity to increase youth participation in civic engagement and peacebuilding. Virtual training programs and e-learning platforms are examples of online services that can give young people the information and abilities they need to participate actively in policy debates and peacebuilding projects. To encourage young people from diverse backgrounds to actively participate in shaping their communities, Albania may, for instance, employ digital platforms to provide tailored courses on advocacy, leadership, and dispute resolution.

Digital Landscape in Albania and Problem Analysis: Gaps in Digitalization for YPS

In order to determine whether Albania's current policies, such the National Digital Agenda 2022-2026, are in line with new technology trends, the policy review phase for this paper looked at them. The results point to weaknesses in the way digital tools are included into youth policy, such as the absence of all-encompassing digital literacy programs and the poor coordination of youth strategies with digital transformation goals. The recommendations stress the necessity of updating policies to include ethical guidelines for the use of AI, digital platforms for civic engagement, and AI training.

To match the policy review with global developments and positioning of Albania in its digitization efforts, the Digital development profile: Albania by the UN was reviewed[10].

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[9]Michele Giovanardi (2024) AI for peace: mitigating the risks and enhancing opportunities;
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384964953_AI_for_peace_mitigating_the_risks_and_enhancing_opportunities
[10]UN, Albania – Digital Development Country Profile (2022);
https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Digital%20Development%20Country%20Profile_Albania_final_02.22.pdf

Key findings show that:

In important worldwide rankings pertaining to innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship, Albania comes in below average. The nation is ranked 83rd out of 131 countries in the Global Innovation Index (2020) and 83rd out of 137 countries in the Global Entrepreneurship Index (2018). Digital Development in Albania competitiveness for the nation, given that according to the Global Competitiveness Index (2019), Albania only comes in at number 81 out of 141 nations.

Albania's ability for innovation and technical readiness paints a mixed image. On the one hand, the nation has made strides in embracing digital technologies and encouraging creativity through programs like startup accelerators and tech centres. However, structural obstacles that prevent Albania from reaching its full digital potential include low investment in R&D and a lack of qualified experts in AI and related sectors. In order to solve these issues, government programs like the National Digital Agenda encourage the development of digital skills and improve technology infrastructure.

As Albania enters digital transformation, it faces both business risks and advantages from integrating artificial intelligence into the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda. The largest segment of Albania's population currently comprises young people, making digital tools highly relevant for transforming peacebuilding activities. Although Albania has set a digital transformation vision, challenges like weak digital networks, poor reading skills among the youth, limited innovation expertise, and fragmented policy standards restrict its progress. The analysis breaks down these challenges and shows how they affect the Youth Peace Security (YPS) strategy (Ziaj, Lula & Stefanllari, 2022).

Internet Infrastructure and Accessibility

Albania has invested a lot in propositions to develop Internet infrastructure, and the National Digital Agenda 2020–2026 exists to upgrade the digital network and connection within the territory of Albania.[11]Technological advancement has ensured that the expansion of broadband internet within urban areas has enhanced the flow of information, and more youth are gaining access to education and employment and participating in covenants of statesmanship. Despite this progress, gaps still exist largely in rural and low-income settings.

Youth Digital Literacy and the Digital Divide

Despite this, Albanian youth are active users of digital platforms. Still, a major deficiency regarding their knowledge of digital citizenship poses a major problem for them in engaging optimally in the YPS framework. Of course, young people actively use social networks and different digital tools, but their capabilities in many cases extend only to the utilization of the mere tools themselves, with little to no ability to work most effectively within such specialties as data analysis, cybersecurity, and AI, to name just a few. In their study, UNESCO (2021) revealed that most of the programs implemented to teach young people digital literacy in Albania do not provide the skills needed to facilitate intricate peacebuilding initiatives through digital approaches.[12]

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[11]The National Agency for Information Society, 2024; featured in an article by RTSH on Albania's updates to digitalization to the European Commission
https://lajme.rtsh.al/artikull/drejtoresha-e-akshi-t-ne-bruksel-rruga-e-digjitalizimit-te-shqiperise-e-panderprere-dhe-e-pakthim-per-te-gjithe
[12]Scoping, P., & Nascimbeni, F. (2019). Digital literacy for children: Exploring definitions and frameworks.
https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/1216/file/%20UNICEF-Global-Insight-digital-literacy-scoping-paper-2020.pdf

Technological Readiness and Innovation Capacity

Albania's innovation system is progressing in some areas and stagnating in others; only time will tell if things improve. Albania has established entrepreneurship development, for example, through the development of startup accelerators, innovation centers, and youth IT clusters. The above initiatives have allowed the disbursement of innovative solutions and entrepreneurship within Albania's youthful population. However, structural challenges like low research and development (R&D) investment and scarcity of skills, especially in AI and advanced digital technology, hinder Albania's progress. According to the World Bank data, improving the employment situation requires a focus on digital skill developments that need to be aided in improving Albania's technological advancement.[13]

Policy Gaps and Lack of Digital Integration in Youth Policies

Albania's policy initiatives for digitalization have been general policy reforms that concerned infrastructures that include internet connectivity and digitization of government services. Despite their coherence with the principles of the National Digital Agenda, these policies are not designed to reflect the interests and opportunities of youth as multipliers of peace and security. In this study, the policies relating to YPS intended to incorporate technology in youth participation programs lack coherency, fluidity, and concentration on particular priorities. For instance, there are programs aimed at the enhanced engagement of youth in policy-making, but such programs do not include digital media technologies for mass civic participation.

Ethical and Governance Challenges

This research identifies that with the development of Albania's digital society, the integration of technologies like AI creates new ethical and governing risks. Young people, who are most active on social media, can be more susceptible to the impact of surveillance, discrimination, and fake news. These issues can only be solved by sound legal initiatives, capacity-making endeavors, and multi-sectoral interventions.

Overall Key Challenges

- Infrastructure and Access: The basic requirements are not fully met, particularly for the rural residents, which puts a wider gap in the digital divide.
- Digital Literacy Gaps: Lack of oral and written computer proficiency reduces the number of youths involved in humanitarian activities.
- Innovation Deficits: Lack of prudential R&D expenditure and restricted knowledge of modern technologies slow the implementation of electronic solutions.[14]
- Policy Fragmentation: Current policies do not encompass provisions for the use or incorporation or youth-oriented technologies for the YPS agenda.
- Ethical Risks: Distortion of the truth, prejudice, and aggressive monitoring undermine the concept of Digital peacebuilding.

[13]Digital Transformation. (2023). World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digital/overview
[14]Ali, T. M., Kausar Kiani, A., Bashir, T., & Khan, T. N. (2021). R&D Expenditure R&D Expenditure as an Accelerator of Economic Growth with Special Reference to Developing Countries. Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies, 7(3). https://doi.org/10.26710/jbsee.v7i3.1842

Reimagining Peacebuilding Efforts in an Inclusive, Efficient, and Forward-Looking Way and Opportunities for Albania

Rethinking peacebuilding initiatives as inclusive, data-driven, and forward-looking procedures that empower young as important stakeholders is made possible by digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Policymakers and peacebuilding professionals can better understand the underlying causes of conflict and implement more focused and efficient interventions by utilising AI's data analytic capabilities. For instance, predictive analytics[15] can be used to spot early indicators of unrest so that preventative action can be taken. Such tools could be especially helpful in Albania when dealing with problems that call for fast and nuanced answers, such as political polarisation and interethnic tensions.

The foundation of these rethought peacebuilding initiatives must continue to be inclusivity. Youth from all backgrounds, particularly those in underprivileged or vulnerable communities, can be guaranteed a place at the table through the design of digital platforms. Examples of digital tools that can democratise decision-making processes and provide youth with a voice in forming peace initiatives include virtual town halls, online surveys, and participatory budgeting platforms. Additionally, by increasing accountability and transparency in peacebuilding initiatives, blockchain technology can improve stakeholder trust and promote increased young participation.

A long-term vision that foresees upcoming opportunities and difficulties must direct the incorporation of digitalisation and artificial intelligence into peacebuilding initiatives. By cultivating collaborations with international organisations, IT firms, and academic institutions, Albania can establish itself as a regional leader in cutting-edge peacebuilding techniques as technology advances.

By doing this, the nation may support the global conversation on using technology for peace and security while simultaneously advancing its own YPS goal. In the face of a world that is changing quickly, this forward-thinking approach guarantees that Albania's peacebuilding tactics continue to be flexible, inclusive, and effective.

Examples of Successful Initiatives Globally

Globally, the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda has benefited greatly from digital and artificial intelligence projects. For example, the "Una Hakika"[16] project in Kenya fights false information that frequently sparks ethnic violence by utilising AI techniques and mobile-based crowdsourcing. By verifying and disseminating correct information, this program has given young people the opportunity to actively support the development of peace in their communities.

The "Young Digital Leaders"[17] program in Europe, administered by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, aims to offer young people the digital literacy and critical thinking talents they need to resist online extremism. By including young people through interactive online platforms and seminars, this effort has successfully promoted positive civic engagement and resistance to radical narratives. In just two years, more than 10,000 students have taken part in the program.

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[15]Transforming Data Analysis: Unleashing the Potential of Data Science Innovations - EliteX - A Global Business Media & Marketing Solution Platform.
https://theelitex.com/transforming-data-analysis-unleashing-the-potential-of-data-science-innovations/
[16]Una Hakika: Managing misinformation with ICTs for open governance and stability
https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/project/una-hakika-managing-misinformation-with-icts-for-open-governance-and-stability/#:~:text=Una%20Hakika%20is%20a%20responsive,%2C%20and%20web%2Dbased%20interaction
[17] Young Digital Leaders program, ISD
https://www.isdglobal.org/young-digital-leaders/#:~:text=Young%20Digital%20Leaders%20is%20an,and%20media%20literacy%20skills%20online.

In a similar vein, the "Build Up"[18] initiative has used digital tools in war areas such as Syria, utilising AI-powered platforms to help young groups communicate and resolve disputes. The potential of AI chatbots to establish safe spaces for conversation, even in areas with restricted physical accessibility, has been demonstrated by their usage to mediate disputes and handle complaints.

Opportunities for Digitalization for Conflict Mitigation and Youth Engagement in Albania

In Albania, digitalization has enormous promise for reducing conflict and involving young people. Analytics technologies with AI capabilities can be used to track social media sites and identify early warning indicators of disturbances or disinformation efforts that could exacerbate tensions among young people.

Youth-focused capacity-building initiatives and civic engagement are crucial for advancing peacebuilding efforts and fostering digital safe spaces. By teaching youth digital literacy, leadership, and conflict resolution techniques, advocacy programs can enable youth to participate actively in their communities. These programs can also concentrate on setting up spaces where young people can work together on peacebuilding projects, express their ideas in a safe manner, and push for laws that represent their interests and goals. Albania can guarantee that online platforms become welcoming areas free from abuse, false information, and divisive content by fostering digital safe spaces. This would enable young people to participate positively in discussions on peacebuilding. Young people can be better prepared to recognise and combat harmful myths on the internet through targeted capacity-building initiatives, which will increase their role as change agents.

Furthermore, collaborations with media outlets offer another avenue to highlight the critical intersection of digitalization and peacebuilding. Media can serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness[19] about the YPS agenda and the transformative potential of digital tools in fostering sustainable peace.

Albania may share success stories that motivate group action and highlight youth-led peacebuilding initiatives by collaborating with traditional and digital media platforms. A greater awareness of the role that digitalisation plays in peacebuilding can be fostered by spreading campaigns that emphasise ethical technology use, dispel false information, and encourage online civic engagement. Furthermore, media collaborations can promote increased participation from young people and officials in public discussions about the advantages and difficulties of incorporating digital tools into Albania's YPS agenda.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

To fully harness the transformative potential of digitalization within the YPS framework, Albania must also prioritize inclusive access to technology and foster collaborative partnerships. It is crucial to close the digital divide, particularly in underserved and rural areas, so that all youth, regardless of socioeconomic status, may take part in civic engagement and peacebuilding initiatives.Furthermore, by developing relationships with international organisations, tech companies, and academic institutions, Albania may be to

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[18]ABuild Up, Syria https://howtobuildup.medium.com/life-in-syria-through-a-peace-lens-e22dfc7fbc93
[19]The impact of social media on human rights violations, social and environmental responsibility & democracy and human rights - StudyQ. https://en.sorumatik.co/t/the-impact-of-social-media-on-human-rights-violations-social-and-environmental-responsibility-democracy-and-human-rights/13977

acquire the resources, expertise, and state-of-the-art tools necessary to maximise the impact of its digital transformation programs. These collaborative projects not only strengthen local capacities but also position Albania as a regional leader in the use of artificial intelligence and digitisation for long-term peacebuilding and youth engagement.

To address the gaps in digitalization for the YPS agenda in Albania, the following recommendations apply to state actors, nongovernmental organizations and educational institutions:

- Bridge the Digital Divide: Increase broadband stimulus in areas not currently served by affordable high-speed internet from public-private partnerships.
- Scale Digital Literacy Programs: Develop massive online youth programs with special attention to youth at risk or with low literacy, providing added emphasis on higher-order skills.
- Invest in Innovation: Strengthen funding for developing an important number of analysis and development projects and encourage cooperation between universities, authorities, and private organizations to create digital competencies.
- Align Policies with YPS Goals: Policy harmonization in using digital tools in youth-led peacebuilding and security agenda.
- Address Ethical Concerns: Develop strategies to manage all relevant risks that any business experiencing digital transformation may face, such as fake news and data protection. If those challenges are solved, Albania could provide education that will help youth become digital leaders and key actors for achieving peace and implement the Strategy for Digital Albania to meet the ideals of the YPS framework.
- Form cross-sectoral partnerships to pool resources and expertise. For instance, Collaborate with non-governmental organisations to offer online courses on peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Create innovation laboratories where young people can collaborate to develop digital solutions for regional problems. Both public and commercial sector funding are available to support these labs.
- Working with experts to draft guidelines for the ethical application of AI in conflict and youth-related monitoring. Establish rules that guarantee accountability, transparency, and inclusivity in the use of AI and digital tools. Developing collaboratively with youth and other stakeholders will increase uptake and credibility.

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